

Global Britain: The Future of UK Diplomacy in a post-Brexit world

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Brexit is sucking the oxygen out of the foreign and security debate in Britain – Brits are consumed by the parochial ping pong political narrative as it pertains to domestic interests and positions. Meanwhile the rest of the world moves on with little more than a mildly interested glance in our direction. In the USA, Brexit is a bit-part issue which will only become truly resonant when the rubber hits the road and the implications of the changes for US companies and US policy in both Britain and EU, become clear. Within the EU itself, Brexit is probably in the top five or so current priorities. But we should not be fooled in thinking it's at the top – it isn't. As for the rest of the world, Brexit is a second or even third tier issue which competes for attention alongside UN reform and other thorny foreign policy concerns!

It is therefore up to Britain to take immediate action to identify and shape its future role on the international stage, while it still has the space and some flexibility to do so. If it doesn't and it remains consumed by its domestic myopia, its future ability to influence internationally and to protect Britain's national interests, will be shaped by others. The option of becoming an inward looking "little Britain" should be dismissed – if Britain is not active internationally and globally focused, it will be unable to protect its people, develop its economy and promote its values. In short, and as our forebears understood and acted upon, for Britain to be successful domestically it must engage internationally.

But current thinking on what a future "Global Britain" approach will look like has been described by some as "mushy". This is harsh, but probably fair! It would not be insulting to suggest that recent Whitehall submissions to the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee setting out the scope of "Global Britain", have been underwhelming and have sought to tweak existing policy and structures rather than seize the opportunity for a complete overhaul. Crafting what a "Global Britain" actually means in reality or looks like, as the shape of our future Foreign Policy, is an opportunity, albeit one with risks (not least how it will be seen by others – *retrenchment or rationalization?*).

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), Britain's hitherto apex entity within the Government on all things international and foreign (famously referred to by Margaret Thatcher as the "*Department for Foreigners*"), has seen its position and resources squeezed by the formation of new Government Departments (Exiting EU and International Trade in particular), the buttressing of others such as International Development and the centralisation of international security and economic policy formulation within the Prime Minister's chambers. If the Government is serious in its ambition to develop a Post-Brexit Global Engagement strategy, it will need a high performing and well-resourced Department to deliver it; one that meshes together the various policy strands and the existing jigsaw of Departments and Agencies, and most importantly, one that is capable of delivering a complex agenda, however broad, on a global stage. This is why Britain needs a functioning and well-resourced Diplomatic agency.

So what could the priorities of a refined "Global Britain" look like? Firstly, the "Foreign Office" should be tasked to use its residual expertise to undertake a major rethink of Britain's mid-term future European engagement policy – both within the EU Block and in the wider Europe. Defining the ambitions of a medium term post-Brexit British foreign and security policy, coupled with an analysis of EU aspirations and goals for its security relationship with Britain, will necessitate a new European diplomatic strategy and enhanced engagement in European capitals. Leaving behind the European Union should not entail a departure from Europe – unless the tectonic plates shift Britain further west into the Atlantic, it will remain an integral and pivotal part of Europe, and particularly of European foreign and security policy.

Secondly there is the need for Britain to formulate a strategy to engage beyond Europe. For decades Britain has sought to remain a global influencer and to have a global foreign policy, with a Diplomatic Service and presence to match. Despite the ambition behind the "Global Britain" tag-line, the prospect of it being able to act alone and to compete globally across the thematic board is unrealistic. Britain will need to develop a targeted and realistic foreign policy based on an understanding of its limitations and with clearly defined engagement goals; much as just about every other sovereign nation has to do! It will need to focus its diplomacy on activities and issues

where Britain as a whole has specific experience and demonstrable excellence; and only then in locations where there is a clear need for an active Diplomatic engagement. Gone are the golden days of Embassies in every capital city. Britain will need to harness its expectations to deliver a global reach that it can afford, staff and sustain. In short and in a Post-Brexit world, **Britain can have a Global approach to its Foreign Policy, but it cannot have a Global presence.**

Foremost among the core Diplomatic activities must come Global Security, including a broad based European strategy, which the remaining members of the EU, post-Brexit will also need (and already recognise that they need). Britain will need to sustain its defence spending at 2% of GDP – a failure to achieve this will cast doubts over its future dependability as a security partner. And it must also sustain commitments to tackle climate change and global environmental and sustainability and to promote international law and the protection of human rights. Britain is rightly seen globally as a fierce advocate for the rule of law and the rights of individuals; this perception must be upheld.

Future economic growth will be predicated on Britain's ability to trade globally and to attract global investment and this must also remain a priority headline. And we should also not lose sight of Britain's other considerable global talents, including its globally respected and envied education system, the English language and its sport, music/arts and tourism. A "Global Britain" policy must project the values of a modern, Global nation through its considerable Soft Power. All of this will take money.

To achieve "Global Britain" the Government will need to consider the structure of its international team. It will require a reallocation of existing FCO resources and a redirection of those from other Departments currently engaged on global issues (including DfID). For its part the FCO must leave the past behind and embrace the change Brexit brings; it must use this new environment as the motivation for radical organizational restructuring, a chance to reshape its agenda and the way it operates and an opportunity to rejuvenate its primacy in Britain's international affairs. In short it should seek to be the very essence of "Global Britain" at what is a pivotal time for the nation.

